



U.S. Department of Justice

Ronald C. Machen Jr.
*United States Attorney for the
District of Columbia*

*Judiciary Center
555 Fourth St. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530*

PRESS RELEASE

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For Information Contact:

Public Affairs

(202) 252-6933

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MS-13 Members Sentenced to Life in Prison On Federal Racketeering Charges - Crimes Included Murder of One Victim, Maiming of Another -

WASHINGTON - Melvin Sorto, 24, also known as Killer, or Fantasma, was sentenced today to a prison term of life plus 45 years for his role in a series of crimes, including a murder, committed by the MS-13 gang in the Washington, D.C. area in 2006 and 2007.

Sorto is the third and final defendant to be sentenced on federal racketeering charges in a case that revealed how the MS-13 members conspired to attack rival gang members as well as potential witnesses. Jose Gutierrez, 22, also known as Astuto or Marco, was sentenced on April 26, 2011 to a life prison term plus 125 years. William Cordova, 26, also known as Centinella or Mario, was sentenced on March 24, 2011 to a life prison term plus 150 years.

The sentences were announced by U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr., John P. Torres, Special Agent in Charge of the Washington Office of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), and Cathy L. Lanier, Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD).

All three men were convicted by a jury in December 2010. They were sentenced by the Honorable Richard J. Leon in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

The men, all from the District of Columbia, were convicted of murder in aid of racketeering, conspiracy to commit murder in aid of racketeering, maiming in aid of racketeering, assaults with dangerous weapons in aid of racketeering, threats in aid of racketeering, first degree murder while armed, assaults with intent to kill and other related offenses.

Among other crimes, they were convicted of taking part in a conspiracy that culminated in the murder of Edwin Ventura, 18, on April 22, 2007.

All told, Sorto was convicted of nine counts. Gutierrez was convicted of 16 counts, and Cordova was convicted of 19 counts.

At trial, the government presented evidence of the defendants' membership in a criminal organization known as La Mara Salvatrucha, also known as MS-13. The government presented evidence of a conspiracy by the defendants and the MS-13 organization to commit numerous violent crimes in aid of racketeering activity. The evidence included crimes of assaults, threats, maiming, extortion, witness intimidation, assaults with intent to kill and the murder of all rival gang members and persons that threatened the MS-13 enterprise.

In reaching their verdicts, the jury found Cordova guilty of the assaults with a dangerous weapon in aid of racketeering of Dennis Diaz-Gutierrez, Josue Levia, and Jhosimar Alvarez-Torrez, on July 30, 2006, in Alexandria, Virginia. The victims were shot numerous times as they sat inside a car at a traffic light.

In addition, the jury found Sorto, Gutierrez, and Cordova guilty of the murder of Ventura and the assault with intent to kill of Nelson Maldonado, on April 22, 2007, in the 2900 block of Sherman Avenue NW, Washington D.C. The victims were shot numerous times in retaliation for an ongoing feud with MS-13 members.

Gutierrez and Cordova were also convicted of the maiming and assault with intent to kill of Feliciano Flores-Esquina Flores, on June 1, 2007, in the 3000 block of Georgia Avenue NW, Washington D.C. The victim was shot two times in the head as she stood at a bus stop. She is now blind as a result of the shooting.

The jury also found all three defendants guilty of numerous local District of Columbia related offenses.

"Melvin Sorto is the third defendant to be sentenced in this case – and like the others, he was given a life prison term plus dozens of years," said U.S. Attorney Machen. "The question that young men and women have to ask themselves in the District of Columbia is whether engaging in gang violence is worth spending the rest of their lives behind bars and away from their family and friends. We are committed to aggressively and proactively prosecuting MS-13 and other violent gangs that threaten our community."

"The sentences handed down in these cases are a message that violent gang activity such as that perpetrated by MS-13 will be dealt with strongly," said Special Agent in Charge Torres. "HSI is committed to enhancing the public safety of the residents in the National Capitol Region by attacking and dismantling transnational gangs such as MS-13."

"Today, we sent a strong message to those who wish to create havoc in our communities," said Chief Lanier. "MPD remains committed and will continue to work along with our law enforcement partners, pursuing, arresting and successfully bringing swift justice, to those involved in gang and criminal activity."

The prosecution is the result of an investigation initiated by the United States Attorney's Office, ICE Homeland Security Investigations, MPD, the Capitol Area Regional Fugitive Task Force, the City of Alexandria Police Department, and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).

In announcing the sentence, U.S. Attorney Machen, Special Agent in Charge Torres and Chief Lanier praised the efforts of the many people who worked on this case, including ICE HSI Agents from the Washington, D.C. Field office, ICE HSI Attaché's office in El Salvador, and MPD Homicide Detectives Jed D. Worrell, Jacqueline Middleton, and Eduardo Voysest. They also recognized the work of MPD Detective Eddie Vazquez of the Capitol Area Regional Fugitive Task Force; MPD Sgt. Juan D. Aguilar; Detectives Emilio Martinez and Elba Longo; MPD Officers Eliseo Medina, Luciano Morales, and the DEA's Special Agent who worked on the case. They also commended the efforts of MPD Officers Sean Dennis, Andres Marcucci, Virgilio Baez, and Derrick Ferguson of the Criminal Intelligence Branch (formerly the Gang Intervention Partnership Unit).

They also acknowledged the work of United States Attorney's Office support personnel Yvonne Bryant, Katina Adams, Dawn Tolson-Hightower, Michael Hailey, David Foster, Eric Urschel and Brendan Tracz. Finally, they praised Assistant United States Attorneys Gilberto Guerrero Jr., and Nihar Mohanty who investigated and prosecuted the case.

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